

Washington, DC – Congressman Jim Moran, Northern Virginia Democrat and co-chair of the Animal Protection Caucus, today joined with Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and a bipartisan group of 44 lawmakers to send a letter to Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in support of protecting the African lion under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

“Based upon the latest scientific evidence, African lions are increasingly threatened with extinction in the wild,” said **Rep. Moran**. “As the world’s leading importer of these iconic creatures, the U.S. must accept our share of the responsibility to preserve their future. Listing the African lion in the Endangered Species Act is an important first step to ensuring these vulnerable animals are protected.”

Specifically, protection under ESA would reduce the incentive to kill lions by preventing hunters from bringing them back to the U.S. as trophies. The African lion is in danger of extinction throughout a significant portion of its habitat and therefore meets the statutory criteria to be listed as endangered under the ESA. As few as 32,000 African lions are in existence today. In most countries where they exist, their populations are too small and isolated to maintain their species.

“The African lion population has decreased by over 50 percent during the past three decades, said **Rep. Blumenauer**. “Due to habitat loss, hunting, disease and more, this animal is now in real danger of extinction. The United States has a long history of leading the way in global conservation efforts and should act swiftly to protect this treasured species.”

On March 1, 2011, a coalition of wildlife protection and conservation organizations petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to list the African lion as an endangered subspecies pursuant to the ESA. On November 27th, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service opened a 60-day comment period on listing the African lion under ESA. Today’s letter was submitted for inclusion in the comment period.

“Right now Americans kill more lions through trophy hunting, and import more lion parts for commercial trade, than any other country in the world. However, we could become a global leader in protecting African lions, rather than a contributor to their disappearance in the wild, by listing them as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act,” stated **Jeff Flocken, North America Regional Director for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)**

“The African lion is facing an uncertain future at best,” said **Adam Roberts, Executive Vice President of Born Free USA.**

“There is a real possibility that more African countries will lose their wild lions altogether if the current situation is not reversed. We need to take urgent measures to conserve the African lion before it’s too late.”

In addition to habitat loss, the bushmeat trade, exotic diseases, conflict with livestock farmers, and illegal trade for use in traditional medicine, studies show that the United States is the world’s largest importer of African lion parts, responsible for 64 percent of global imports from 1999 to 2008.

“The United States is the leading importer of lions and lion parts for hunting trophies and commercial trade—this includes skulls, claws, hides, and live lions,” said **Teresa Telecky, Director of Wildlife, The Humane Society of the United States.**

“Some Americans’ thirst for exotic goods and trophies to hang on their walls is driving lions to extinction. The African lion simply cannot endure this level of exploitation if their long-term survival is to be ensured.”